Chapter I

THE COMMUNITY OF BANG CHAN

The Geographical Setting

In the populous flat central plain of Thailand where Bang Chan was located, fenceless geometric rice-fields, dotted by clumps of trees, stretch as far as the eye can see. Houses, clustering occasionally into hamlets, line the canals that serve for domestic use, drainage, irrigation, and communication. A few rounded-up roads lead out from Bangkok, the national capital on the Menam Chao Phraya, the great central river.

The monsoon divides the year into three seasons: a hot and wet (late May through November); a cool and dry (December to mid-February); and a hot and dry (late February to mid-May). The temperatures range annually from 59° to 89° F. (15° to 32° C.) with monthly means of 77° to 86° F. (25° to 30° C.) (de Young:5). A drop at night averages around 18° F. (10° C.) in April, and 22° F. (12° C.) in January, while the relative humidity varies between 65 per cent and 81 per cent (Hauck, et al.:12). Rainfall averages about 50 inches a year, 40 of which fall in the wet season (Janlekha:21). Because of the run-off from the mountains in the north, once a year the Menam Chao Phraya slowly rises, fills the canals and then overflows its banks, covering the plain for hundreds of miles to a depth of three feet or more. In Bang Chan, the water stood on the land from June until January, with its peak in October. From February to May the canals ran low, and the land dried and cracked from the intense heat.

The Community

In 1954, 1700 persons (336 families) lived in Bang Chan. Muslims, comprising 10 per cent of the population, lived as fully Thai citizens in all parts of the community in economic and social symbiosis with Buddhists. A few ethnic Chinese had married into Thai families and were accepted.

The community spread over an area of about 7000 rai (1000 hectares or 4 square miles). Bang Chan Canal bisected

Bang Chan Canal bissected

the community and joined, about one mile south, Sāensaēb Canal, a broad old waterway connecting Bangkok and Mīnburī with the canal network of the central plains. A well-raised, year-round road which ran between Bangkok, 20 miles to the southwest, and Mīnburī, two miles east, cut through one side of the area. On it lay Bang Khūat, another community, about eight kilometers from Bang Chan (cf. Kaufman:1960), and a cluster of houses called "Kilō pēet," (Kilō 8) both west of Bang Chan and nearer to Bangkok. A shallow canal flanked this road most of the way.

The town of Mīnburī with district offices, shops, and pharmacists, and a good-sized Muslim population was well-known to most of the residents of Bang Chan. Its middle school drew from the surrounding farming countryside, including Bang Chan, those few pupils whose educational aspirations led them beyond the local elementary school. Mīnburī had electricity, but no telephone or telegraph facilities.

For nine months of the year, while Bang Chan lay under water, most of the marketing was done through boat-vendors who plied the canals. During the dry months, or for large festivities, people marketed at Mīnburī, Kilō pēet, or in Bangkok.

The Thai government administered Bang Chan through two district offices (amphoē), one located in Mīnburī, the other in Bangkapi, close to Bangkok. The common boundary of their respective districts happened to run through the middle of the community. Seven local head men, each in charge of one of the seven hamlets (mūban) into which the entire community was divided, reported to one or the other district office. They transmitted instructions from their superiors to the farmers, maintained order mostly by their personal prestige, and kept the village census more or less up to date by recording and reporting marriages, births, and deaths.

At the center of the community was the cherished Buddhist temple with its abbot, monks, and novices, numbering 15 to 50 depending on the season. The elementary public school, occupying one of its buildings,[1] was attended by 300 children aged eight to fifteen, both Buddhist and Muslim. The temple compound was surrounded by a number of houses, including a cafe and stalls for small vendors. A small country mosque (surao) in another hamlet was the religious center for the Muslim minority, some of whose children attended another school just outside the Bang Chan community. The abbot and the imam, the respective local heads of the two religious faiths, were of importance in the community as leaders.

1. A new large school has since been built away from the temple compound.

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[503] Besides the work in rice-fields, women dug and cleaned
[226] canals and ditches, mounded land, and fished in many ways, the most laborious of which was plunging a heavy basket into the mud to catch burrowing fish. In the household chores, in which men shared to some extent, they carried water, cut and fetched wood, tended livestock, cultivated kitchen gardens, pounded rice in mortars, and cleaned houses. Boats were rowed [501] by paddling or sculled by standing and pushing a single large oar. Cooking was time consuming. The low stoves were on the [354] ground or floor. Since there were no tables or chairs, one squatted two to four hours a day to cut or pound ingredients, [352] stir the curry, or wash the dishes.
[516]

868 The training of boys and girls for farm and household
561 work was thorough and started early. By 18 years of age,
461 boys and girls with few exceptions were experienced in every step of farming. Janlekha's chart (1955:82) indicates the progression (parenthetical additions are the present author's):

Age	Method	Kinds of farm work
5 - 7	not forced, but allowed or induced to work if they want to	light hauling, removal of weeds which have been turned over by harrowing
8 - 12	mild pressure	light hauling, removal of weeds which have been turned over by harrowing; some household work and help in the kitchen - girls only - (sometimes boys)
13 - 14	moderate pressure	hauling, weeding, buffalo-tending, transplanting, chicken-feeding, fishing, household work (boys and girls)
15 - 16	high pressure	all kinds of farm work, harrowing, harvesting, and uprooting - boys only - are started at this age.

872 Children worked in the fields before and after school
461 which, compulsory for all children aged eight to fourteen, was held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. five and one-half days a week. Vacations coincided with peak work seasons so children could help in the fields or at home.

Bangkok. The tropical monsoon climate divides the year into three seasons, a hot, wet season from late May to November, a cooler, dry season from December to early February, and a hot, dry season from late February to mid-May. The community, scattered over an area of approximately five square miles, was composed of seven neighboring hamlets. In 1954, the population was approximately 1700, divided among 336 households. About 60 per cent of the households were made up of independent families, parents with unmarried children, with an average family size of 5.7 persons. The main occupation of 80 per cent of all families was rice farming.

The climate together with the overflowing Chao Phraya river, provided natural conditions for raising a single crop of wet rice. From May or June to February, the principal activities were those connected with rice production. This crop greatly exceeded the needs for local consumption as human food, feed, and seed. The surplus of rice which was sold, was estimated for 1953 as 1.4 times the amount used for all purposes within the village (Janlekha, 1955).

Wat Bang Chan, the Buddhist monastery and place for religious exercises, was also the center of social life in the community. When data for this study were being gathered, the one primary school in the village was located on the grounds of the wat. The community was defined simply by the clientele which patronized Wat Bang Chan and this elementary school. Within the area of the community lived a small minority of Thai Moslems who patronized a mosque and school just outside Bang Chan. The few Chinese in the village were considered as part of the Thai-Buddhist community. Information to be presented on food habits refers primarily to habits of the Buddhist majority, although some reference will be made to ways in which Moslem practices differed therefrom.

Although for six or more months of the year the fields were covered with water, sometimes to a depth of a meter or more, a year-round road, connecting Bangkok and Minburi, the nearest market town, ran through one edge of the village. Bus service was available along this road, to either Bangkok or Minburi but within the community one went by boat on the network of canals during the wet season, and during the dry season, on foot along the dikes or across fields. From late January through May, when subsidiary canals were apt to be dry, getting about was somewhat difficult. Boat travel was considered easy, but as many families had only one boat, a trip to the store or even to a neighbor's home had to be planned with reference to the activities of other family members.

Large scale purchases, as for a ceremony, were always made at a big market, but in general, instead of people going to the market-town, the "market" came to the people. Boat-venders brought not only fresh produce and staples but also sweets, ices, soft drinks, and cooked foods such as Chinese

2: Hauck et al. D.E-5 (1952-1954) 1958 AO7 Central Thai AO7 Bang Chan

221 132 246 244 245 292 464 544 503 964 871

Chart 1. SEASONAL CYCLE - BANG CHAN, THAILAND, 1953-54

	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.
Season	→ ←WET→							←COOL→		←HOT→		
Temperature (°C)[1]	30	29	28	29	29	28	26	25	25	28	30	30
Humidity, rel., %	77	80	81	81	80	78	74	70	70	65	66	67
Rainfall	---→ heavy		moderate	←heavy→		←light→			←negligible			
Canals		rising			high	(floods)			lowering fast		low,dry	
Cultivation of Rice		plowing→ seedbed grown				growing	early var. mature					
			TRANSPLANTING				←HARVEST→					
School		vacation						vacation			vacation	
Cash available Source	cash in hand	rice				←cash shortage→					cash in hand	
					cash jobs→				main rice sale			
Fruit;vegetables	→	←new planting→							←annuals die			
Fish: Supplies	ponds drained→								←ponds drained			
Maturation			←many varieties→						←best varieties→			
Preserving	←much→		←moderate→						←most→			
Ceremonies	ceremonies→		←Buddhist Lent→							←ceremonies		
Dietary survey	→	←Round I→		←Round II→				←Round III→		←Round IV		

1. Mean temperatures and relative humidity estimated from charts for Bangkok and the central plain of Thailand (Bunnag and Dhararak, 1947). Mean monthly temperature range from 25-30°C corresponds to 77-86°F; diurnal variations are greater, averaging 18°F (10°C) in April and 22°F (12°C) in January.

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
AO7 Central Thai AO7
Bang Chan

Houses in the village vary considerably in appearance: from the bamboo and thatch dwellings of the poorest families to the sturdy, great gabled houses of teak built by Bang Chan's original settlers to the tiled and corrugated iron-roofed homes of the newly rich. Most, however, follow the traditional Siamese pattern of being built on posts two to ten feet off the ground, mainly as a protection against flood waters. Many homes in Bang Chan give the impression of being permanently unfinished, the bamboo houses because they require constant refurbishment, the wooden dwellings because they are made of teak which seasons best when left untreated and exposed directly to the elements. The merging upper-class urban pattern of painting teakwood has not yet reached Bang Chan.

The major thoroughfare of the community, bisecting it in a north-south direction and perpendicular to the Bangkok-Minburi highway, is Khlɔɔŋ (or Canal) Bang Chan, which links with Khlɔɔŋ Sɛɛn Sɛɛb three kilometers south of the village. The latter, dug in the 1840's and originally intended as a military route to the Cambodian frontier, is one of several major canals dug during the mid-nineteenth century as part of the vast canal system that was constructed in the Central Plain when the region was opened for commercial rice production. Together with the highway built since World War II, a one-hour bus ride to the capital, Khlɔɔŋ Sɛɛn Sɛɛb, provides the villagers with their major access to Bangkok and the rest of the Central Plain. By motorboat a trip to Bangkok via this large, bustling canal takes approximately three hours.

Despite these relatively good communications facilities and the long-standing Thai peasant tradition to *paj thiaw* ("to go around"—for fun, on visits, pilgrimages, often for long distances) few people outside the immediate vicinity of the village have ever heard of Bang Chan. The community is neither a landmark nor is it located near one; it is not famed for any activities (other than having become the research site for the "American professors"); and because it is not a spatially integrated village, Bang Chan cannot even be found on any map of Thailand. Like most Thai settlements, Bang Chan has a Buddhist monastery and a government elementary school. It is these two structures that give the village its identity and the local people a sense of belonging to a community. People say that they live "at home in Bang Chan" because they make their merit at the monastery of Bang Chan and send their children to the Bang Chan school. Approximately five square miles in size and inhabited by 1,771 people living in 296 households (1956 village census), Bang Chan seems in physical appearance and social significance like the thousands of other communities that dot the rice fields of the great Central Plain.

To what extent Bang Chan may be considered "typical" in an analytic sense of other villages of the Mɛɛnaam Valley, or even of the country as a

7: Janlekha X-4,5 (1948-1953)1956 AO7 Central Thai AO7
Bangchan

CHAPTER II

THE COMMUNITY

Geography

131 The community of Bangchan is situated some twenty road-miles northeast of Bangkok in the heart of the economically all-important commercial rice growing area of central 361 Thailand. Surrounded by their rice fields, the population [161] of about 1,600 persons lives on some three hundred small [503] family homesteads scattered along a half dozen connecting [243] canals. The community occupies an area of 6,500 rai,[1] or 2,600 acres, all of which, with the exception of about 300 rai of homesites and narrow strips bordering canals, is given over to the production of wet rice.

134 The soil of Bangchan area is heavy dark clay with 243 an impervious layer at a depth of about six to eight inches and is suited only to rice growing.

133 The area is essentially flat, rising slightly toward 312 the north. It receives, in addition to rain water, irrigation water channeled into it through the Seen-saeb Canal one mile to the south, Samwa Canal one mile to the east, and Khlong-song Canal one mile to the north.[2]

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[804] 1. One rai is equal to two-fifths of an acre.

2. See map on page 162.

361 direction dividing it into two halves, the Bangchan half
312 consisting of BC4, BC5, BC6, and the Kannayao half consistingof KY5, KY6, KY7 and KY8.

621 As mentioned earlier, our functional Bangchan village
634 is under two different administrative authorities, the Bangchan half consisting of part of Tambol Bangchan which is in turn part of Amphur Minburi in Changwad Phra-nakorn (Bangkok) and the Kannayao half consisting of part of Tambol Kannayao which is part of Amphur Bangkapi in the same Changwad Phra-nakorn.

History of Settlement

174 No official records on the history of the settlement
361 of Bangchan could be discovered, but evidence from genealo-
[503] gies provides a few clues on the subject. Following the digging of Saensaeb Canal some one hundred and twenty years ago, settlement was made along the banks of this important canal which provides one of the few connections between the
175 Menam and Bangprakong rivers. It was not, however, until
621 the 1870's, apparently, that people found it necessary to
361 move onto the land away from the canal. At that time, according to one of our older informants, her father was born in what is now Bangchan, his father and mother having come out from Bangkok as a young married couple to take up farm-
175 ing where plenty of land was available from the Crown. These
621 people and their followers, usually kinfolk or friends, cleared off scrub jungle areas in which, it is claimed, tigers and

#243 growing village could not very well be studied in a brief period of only one rice year. Rather, the field study should be extended to cover years of good as well as poor crop.

Land Utilization

Official records show that the area of land privately owned in the seven hamlets comprising Bangchan is 6,404 rai. [503] When an estimated area of 100 rai of public land occupied by the half dozen canals is added to the private land area, the total area of the village may be figured at about 6,500 rai.

#243 951 423 911 621 The area of each of the 298 homelots in Bangchan varied. It is rather difficult to get accurate figures for these homelot areas. We may, however, give an allowance of one rai for each homelot on the basis of crude estimate. This would include space for buildings and all of the home compound including family pools as well as kitchen garden, and in some cases area devoted to fruit trees. Since all of the land area in Bangchan other than homelots is devoted to rice growing, we may estimate the land available for rice production by simply deducting the homelot area from the total area of land privately owned in the village. This was found to be 6,106 rai in 1953 (Table 12).

#243 911 423 621 It should be noted that not all of this area of 6,106 rai was tilled by Bangchan residents, and that some of the villagers also worked on rice fields outside our arbitrary

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 113]

7: Janlekha X-4,5 (1948-1953)p956 AO7 Central Thai AO7
Bangchan

MAP I

131
103
102
634
361
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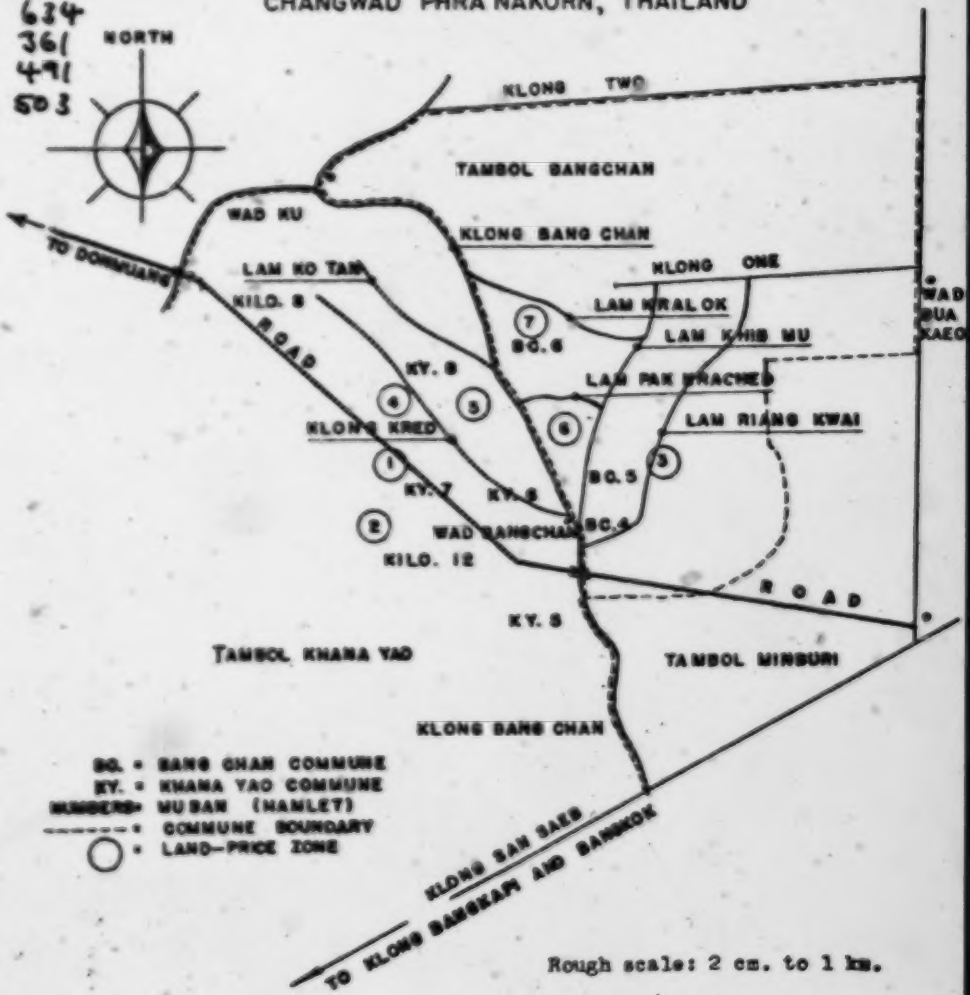
503

SKETCH MAP OF TAMBOL KHANA YAO, AMPHOE BANGKAPI
AND TAMBOL BANGCHAN, AMPHOE MINBURI
CHANGWAD PHRA NAKORN, THAILAND



Rough scale: 2 cm. to 1 km.